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ABSTRACT

Rhetorical theorists since Socrates have advocated a rhetoric that reveals truth and avoids concealment. This tradition rests, however on the questionable epistemological assumptions that data exist prior to the linguistic formualtion of them and that such data can be articulated in objectively verifiable discourse. In opposition to this point of view, it can be argued that data are brought into existence by particular linguistic discourses and in turn support the discourses. Each particular discourse, in selecting certain data, must necessarily ignore and suppress others; no discourse avoids concealment althogether. Moreover, those discourses that appear to be impartial and objective are actually most deceptive, because they seduce the audience into believing that they portray an independent "truth." Therefore, rhetorical theory requires new strategies to unmask what such discourses conceal.
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Rhetorical Concealment

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The Critique of Concealment

Theorists of rhetoric from Socrates to the present have distinguished good rhetoric, an attempt to disclose and communicate the truth in unbiased, reasoned speech from bad rhetoric, the use of weighted language and specious argumentation to conceal facts and bolster one's cause. Socrates makes such a distinction in the Gorgias and the Phaedrus, in the former arguing that bad rhetoric, unlike the objective, neutral discourse of dialectic, is not an art or technē at all because it does not have knowledge of the true nature of things (physis). Rather, rhetoric is merely a routine derived from experience (empeira) without true scientific foundations (Plato, 1967:465a), a knack for flattery (Plato, 1967:463a), for persuading others to accept appearances rather than realities, appealing to what is superficially pleasant rather than what is best. In an elaborate analogy (Plato 1967:464b-e), Socrates compares rhetoric as a species of flattery of the soul to cooking, a flattery of bodily tastes. Just as cooking is the eidolon of medicine, administering pleasurable rather than healthful foods, so rhetoric imitates true judgment, replacing reasoned argument with merely persuasive appeals.

But this bad rhetoric may be rejected for a good rhetoric, says Socrates, if as in the Phaedrus it is identified with dialectic, a verbal art of searching for and sharing the truth. To master good rhetoric, Socrates explains, the first priority is an accurate knowledge of the world. 'First you must know the truth about the subject', he explains, and 'secondly you must have a corresponding discernment of the nature of the soul, discover the types of speech appropriate to each nature, and order and arrange your discourse accordingly. All this must be done if you are to become competent, within h man limits, as a scientific practitioner of Speech' (Plato 1968:227b-c).

Since Socrates, this epistemological distinction between good and bad rhetoric has often been articulated, and contemporary theorists of rhetoric continue to defend the former from those detractors who speak of the deceptiveness and danger of the rhetorical enterprise. Wayne Booth remarks that 'rhetoric has almost always had a bad press, and it more often than not still carries a sense of trickery or bombastic disguise for a weak case, making the worse appear the better cause. But I am groping toward something far more important. . . .a view of rhetoric as the whole art of discovering and sharing warrantable assertion' (Booth 1974:11). A rhetoric based on concealment is extremely dangerous, for 'an open society living by a rhetoric of deception cannot long endure' (Booth 1974:202n). What is needed is a rhetoric which discloses

truth, rather than one which conceals facts and good reasons in a given case. Good rhetoric does not attempt to persuade someone to adopt a new position, says Booth, to push a listener away from what is reasonable, but rather to engage in objective, publicly verifiable investigation, a kind of 'critical inquiry' employing impartial, objective discourse. 'The supreme purpose of persuasion in this view would not be to talk someone into a preconceived view'; rather 'it must be to engage in mutual inquiry or exploration' (Booth 1974: 137).

Donald Bryant similarly rejects a bad rhetoric which, like that of the Gorgias, is intent upon concealment rather than scientific disclosure of the facts. Such a rhetoric, he explains, is mere 'empty language, or language used to deceive without honest intention behind it' (Bryant 1972:17). And the need for good rhetoric to grasp the objective truth is echoed by Lloyd Bitzer, who argues that the rhetor must be responsible to the determinate facts of a given situation. The objective factual situation in which the rhetor finds himself is 'the very ground of rhetorical activity' (Bitzer 1968:5), and consists of an 'exigence' potentially modifiable through discourse, and several objective constraints such as audience, place, time. The exigence and the constraints, says Bitzer, 'which generate rhetorical discourse are located in reality, are objective and publicly observable facts in the world we experience' (Bitzer 1968:11). Because the situation must somehow

prescribe the response that fits (Bitzer 1968:10), the rhetor who fails to respond to the objective truth or facts, who fails to adequately characterize the truth in an observational discourse, has failed to 'read the prescription accurately' (Bitzer 1968:11).

And if good rhetoric aims at uncovering an objective truth, of eschewing concealment of facts, its means for doing so is an objective, publicly verifiable discourse or dialectic. Echoing Socrates, contemporary theorists urge a union of dialectic and rhetoric. Richard Weaver, for example, argues that 'dialectic is a method of investigation whose object is the establishment of truth about doubtful prepositions,' and that rhetoric is a 'branch of dialectic' (Weaver 1953:15,16). And Maurice Natanson urges the same rapproachment of the two arts, stating that 'good rhetoric, as Plato pointed out in the Phaedrus, presupposes dialectic: persuasion presupposes truth. . .a reapproach to the nature of rhetoric is possible through a philosophical examination of its foundations in dialectic' (Natanson 1972:132).

The Need for Concealment

This traditional distinction between good and bad rhetoric seems prima facie reasonable and even ethical. In any rhetorical situation, one would, it seems, strive to discover the available facts, concealment of data indicating fool-

ishness or unethical self interest. Further, the most appropriate discourse in which the data are articulated would seem to be an objective, neutral account which avoided undue distortion or bias; those engaged in rhetorical coloring of the facts would rightly be mistrusted. And yet, despite the seeming reasonableness and morality of the 'good rhetoric' tradition, it cannot go unexamined, for it rests for its strength on two questionable epistemological assumptions. Granted, not every theorist who distinguishes good and bad rhetoric would assent to these assumptions, but they are often implicit even in the most recent formulations. The first assumption is that there are phenomena, or facts, or data in the world which are observable independently of or prior to any particular discourse; that is, that there is a realm of experience or perception which is prior to a verbal account of it; that there are data which we observe and only later interpret according to a particular discourse. The primary data here may be construed as what John Searle asserts are 'brute facts' about the world (Searle 1969:51); or I. A. Richard's unimpeachable 'external world' (Richards 1925:126) common to all individuals; or as what E. D. Hirsch sees as irreducible determinate meaning of a given text (Hirsch 1973:224). The 'data' are perceptually prior to hermeneutics; experience is logically prior to discursive articulation.

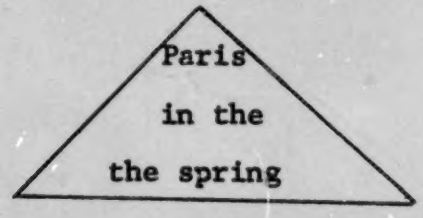
The second correlative assumption underlying the tradition

is that the discourse of a good rhetoric can, within reason, impartially portray or describe the facts in the world. Whereas we may dispute the significance of certain facts, it is possible to articulate in an acceptable public language an account of the facts which we all would agree on. In I. A. Richards' terms, we will agree on the 'scientific', represented meaning of statements, but may differ over its 'emotional' power or significance (Richards 1925:267). Critics may reasonably argue, say, over Hamlet's motives in delaying revenge, but few or none will seriously contend that he does not delay. According to Elder Olson, a 'perfect interpretation' is one which is absolutely 'commensurate in its basic inferential and evaluative propositions with the data, the implications, and the values contained in the work' (Olson 1964:227-8). Two individuals gazing at the sun on the horizon may differ over whether it is mobile or stationary, but both, presumably, will be talking about the same sun.

Yet reasonable as these assumptions may seem, namely, that we all experience and can articulate more or less the same things, the assumptions are, I believe, erroneous and even insidious. In opposition, I shall argue, first, there are no 'facts' or data dependent of our particular articulations of them; that rather, certain data are only brought into existence by and in turn support particular linguistic formulations. Correlatively, each particular discourse, in articulating one selection of facts, simultaneously must suppress

and conceal all those incompatible phenomena which it does not select. This is not necessarily a deceptive act, but a function of how discourse selects and arranges phenomena. Hence, there is no 'good' or neutral discourse which merely presents 'all' the facts; every account conceals as well as reveals. Even, and especially, the discourses which we take as objective, neutral, a 'matter of course,' such as those found, say, in the natural sciences or literary scholarship, systematically suppress and conceal alternative formulations and incompatible data.

The first assumption I wish to challenge is that we all see the same things independently of our interests and verbal accounts. Clearly it is the case that we tend to see things when we are interested in them and expect to see them; and that we ignore and overlook many things which we are not looking for. On an automobile trip through a number of small towns, for example, we look for, and usually quite easily find, the road signs demarcating our highways as it winds through a village. Yet while driving in our own familiar city, we most often ignore, and indeed do not even see, those same highway signs. In the following sign, we will probably see what we expect to see rather than what is literally written:



Most people will project and read 'Paris in the spring', omitting the redundant 'the'.

If our interests and expectations often shape what we perceive, so the degree of specialization of our vocabulary both reflects and establishes what we are able to experience. An eskimo trapper looking at a wintry landscape will most likely see something quite different from what I will see, given his orientation and his proverbial fifty-two words for snow. And conversely, were he to visit my city, he would, upon seeing a passing automobile for the first time, see something quite different from what I see. Whereas he may see a moving vehicle, I, being an auto buff, will see, say, a Ford Pinto or a Mercedes coupe. It is not the case that we each see the 'same thing,' and that I then 'interpret' what I see, say a 'moving vehicle' as a Pinto or Mercedes. Rather I simply see the Pinto or coupe, and really engage in no extra, or special, act of interpretation.

The dependence of perception upon linguistic and conceptual formulation may also be seen in discussions among scientists engaged in examining natural phenomena such as heavenly bodies, gases, or electricity. If two astronomers, Kepler and Tycho Brahe, are each looking at the sun at dawn, the former believing that the sun is stationary, the latter that the sun is mobile, they will not see the 'same sun,' but will perceive quite different things. It is not the case that they each see the 'same thing' and then interpret it differently; rather, as

Norwood Hanson argues, each sees different things because they organize their experiences differently in the act of seeing. Tycho sees a mobile sun and Kepler a static sun; and the seeing is in each case 'theory laden', in which observation of an object 'is shaped by a prior knowledge of' that object (Hanson 1969:17,19).

Thomas Kuhn makes a similar point in his discussion of Lavoisier's discovery and perception of oxygen. Prior to Lavoisier's discovery, scientists such as Priestly would have seen, upon examination of phenomena, 'depholgisticated air.' But after his theory had been articulated, notes Kuhn, Lavoisier saw 'Oxygen where Priestly had seen depholgisticated air and where others had seen nothing at all' (Kuhn 1971:118). A parallel case arises in the discovery of electricity, where scientists operating with a new theory and new discourse saw different things from that of earlier investigators. According to Kuhn, 'during the seventeenth century, when their research was guided by one or another effluvium theory, electricians repeatedly saw chaff particles rebound from, or fall off, the electrified bodies that had attracted them. . .placed before the same apparatus, a modern observer would see electrostatic repulsion (rather than mechanical or gravitational rebounding)' (Kuhn 1971:117). Thus, concludes Kuhn, scientists operating with different assumptions and theories 'see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked

before' (Kuhn 1971:111). In Paul Feyerabend's phrase, 'we find that science knows no "bare facts" at all but the "facts" that enter our knowledge are already viewed in a certain way and are, therefore, essentially ideational' (Feyerabend 1975: 19). And Stanley Fish summarizes this dependence of "observations" on language, remarking that 'What anyone sees is not independent of his verbal and mental categories but is a product of them, and it is because these catagories rather than being added to perception are its content, that the entities they bring into being seem to be a part of the world in the sense that they were there before anyone was to perceive them' (Fish 1977:3).

If it is the case that there are no neutral observations unshaped by particular discourses, that indeed, the discourse brings its data into existence, it is also true that each discourse must select a limited amount of phenomena to illuminate, and that in the selection necessarily conceal, reject, suppress other possible phenomena. Certainly in Lavoisier's case it was impossible after acceptance of the theory to perceive phlogiston; and after Clerk Maxwell's theory of electromagnetism was accepted, it became increasingly difficult to perceive an "ether" in which light was to travel. Nor is this concealment and supression of phenomena by discourse a function of natural sciences alone. Rather, all human inquiry operates in this way. Noam Chomsky remarks that unseen biases

of scholarship may include its very stress on order and precision. The historian Gabriel Jackson, he argues, was unable to be sympathetic with the Spanish anarchists of the thirties because of their disorganization. 'It is characteristic of the attitudes taken by liberal (and communist) intellectuals towards revolutionary movements that are largely spontaneous and loosely organized. . .It is the convention of scholarship that the use of such terms. . .demonstrate naive and muddle-headed sentimentality' (Chomsky 1969: 75-76). Another example may be drawn from the seemingly objective literary scholarship of as widely a respected text as Erich Aurbach's Mimesis. In his wide learning and balanced scholarship, Aurbach appears to be open to all relevant data. And yet Aurbach himself admits that this is not at all the case; that in writing the book he was fortuitiously prevented from examining all the available data about which he was writing. He began writing Mimeses while exiled from his native Europe and its libraries. Thus, he explains, 'the book was written during the war and at Istanbul, where the libraries are not well equipped for European studies' (Aurbach 1971:557). But rather than hindering his enterprise, by effectively closing off his access to books and articles, this exile instead facilitated his project. He thus admits that 'it is quite possible that the book owes its existence to just this lack of a rich and specialized library. If it had been possible for me to acquaint myself with all the work

that had been done on so many subjects, I might never have reached the point of writing' (Aurbach 1971:557).

Paul de Man generalizes this need of the literary critic to delimit his vision, claiming that the ability to perceive new aspects of a text or an oeuvre depends on an ability to blind oneself to certain phenomena. The creative reader thus does not attempt to read a text in a way which is faithful to all the evidence, or all the data which other critics have unearthed. Rather the reader deliberately suppresses certain information, restricting his vision in order to be able to see in new ways. Only by being thus blind can he attain new insights. (de Man 1971). The 'perfect interpretation' is not one which is somehow faithful to all the 'data' in the text, as for Olson. Rather, the useful interpretation is one which violates our earlier readings of the text, unearths new phenomena, reshapes our vision.

The Strategy of Concealment

The task of the interpreter of contexts and texts is thus always a struggle to articulate a theory and establish data, thereby suppressing the 'data' of opposed formulations. This suppression and concealment of facts is not an unethical act, however, as the Socratic tradition has implied. It is not something which we ought to think we can avoid for the sake of

a 'good' neutral rhetoric. For in the instances of Lavoisier and Aurbach, it would have been impossible to perceive new phenomena had one restricted his vision to the 'facts' revealed and supportive of the earlier discourses. And further, it is dangerous to overlook the fact that all discourses, particularly those which are most persuasive and powerful, succeed by crowding out and suppressing their opponents. Michael Foucault demonstrates how this occurs in 'disciplines' of knowledge, such as psychiatry, penology, and linguistics, which 'constitute a system of control in the production of the discourse' (Foucault 1972:224), and which systematically suppress alternative incompatible formulations of phenomena. The discourse, he explains, appears to be rational and neutral because it is so persuasive; and in turn a source and indication of its power and persistency is this very appearance of neutral and objective an appearance which prevents us from seeing that is is in fact a 'vocation of exclusion' (Foucault 1972:220). As Edward Said notes, 'Foucault's greatest contribution is to an understanding of how the appetite for or will to exercise raw control in society and history has won the right to clothe itself systematically, disguise itself systematically. . . in the language of truth, discipline, rationality' (Said 1977:45).

The greatest danger of this seemingly neutral discourse is that we are deceived into thinking that it is not repressive or concealing of incompatible phenomena. We are seduced into

believing that it presents the objective truth, one which, as rational beings, we are compelled to accept. It is as if we are faced with the rigid walls of Dostoevsky's underground man; those irrefutable laws of nature which only the insane could deny. This grand seduction of seemingly neutral discourse, then, lies in its ability to persuade us, first, that what it purports is the truth; and second, that is in itself is a neutral discourse, transparent, objective. It is this double persuasion which has captivated and underlies the Socratic tradition of good and bad rhetoric, which distinguishes between a good rhetoric which presents the truth and a bad rhetoric which conceals the truth. My claim, in opposition, is that all discourse in every instance simultaneously conceals phenomena while it reveals others, and that the most deceptive and seductive discourse is that which seems not to conceal at all.

A rhetoric intent on unmasking this seemingly neutral discourse faces a very difficult task, for it cannot appeal to the "facts" or obvious phenomena in refuting the established position. The reason is that these facts and phenomena are themselves brought into existence by and in turn are supportive of that very discourse, the result being a closed 'hermeneutic' circle of data and discourse, of experience and theory. We are thus forced to develop a new kind of rhetorical strategy, one which the Socratic tradition will castigate as deceptive and concealing. For what we must do is develop strategies of

concealment which somehow negate or cover up the 'facts' of the hegemonious, established discourse. Only in this way can we create an alternative discourse, with its own revealed phenomena, data, evidence. Paul Feyerabend suggests that this very procedure is used by revolutionary thinkers in the sciences, arts, and praxis. He suggests introducing, elaborating and propagating hypothesis which are inconsistent either with 'accepted and highly confirmed theories' or with 'well established facts' (Feyerabend 1975:29). What is needed, then, are counterfactual (and counterlogical) arguments, which allow us to conceal the received facts and to establish new supporting (and potentially refuting) data. Such an approach ought not be considered immoral, even though it is disruptive of the accepted order. For knowledge which is stable indicates our failure to progress beyond a limited stage. Great revolutions and developments in science, the arts, and in social praxis reveal that only by struggling against the established order of things, denying not only the assumptions but also the facts of the hegemonious discourse, will we be able to progress and to grow.

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